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A new geographic record of the clouded tiger-cat *Leopardus pardinoides* (Schreber, 1775) in the Bolivian Yungas

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ABSTRACT
The genus *Leopardus* comprises 13 species of Neotropical felids, including the Andean oncilla or clouded tiger-cat *Leopardus pardinoides,* which was recently elevated to species status and is poorly known in the south of its distribution range. On February 8, 2025, we recorded an individual in the humid montane forests of Carrasco National Park. This is the first sighting of the species in the department of Cochabamba and in the protected area, filling a gap of 760 km in the distribution of this species in Bolivia.

Keywords: Carrasco National Park, Cochabamba, Felidae, humid montane forest, new departmental record

RESUMEN – Un nuevo registro geográfico del gato tigre nublado, *Leopardus pardinoides* (Schreber, 1775), en los Yungas bolivianos
El género *Leopardus* comprende 13 especies de félidos neotropicales, incluyendo a la oncilla Andina o el gato tigre nublado *Leopardus pardinoides*, recientemente elevado a la categoría de especie y poco conocido en el sur de su área de distribución. El 8 de febrero de 2025 registramos un individuo en los bosques húmedos montanos del Parque Nacional Carrasco. Este es el primer avistamiento de la especie para el departamento de Cochabamba y el área protegida, completando así un vacío de 760 Km en la distribución de esta especie en Bolivia.

Palabras clave: bosques húmedos montanos, Cochabamba, Felidae, nuevo registro departamental, Parque Nacional Carrasco

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The genus *Leopardus* comprises 13 species of small Neotropical felids (Mammal Diversity Database 2025), with seven species occurring in Bolivia after the taxonomic revision of the pampas cat species complex (Nascimento et al. 2020). The oncilla *Leopardus tigrinus* (Schreber, 1775) also underwent significant taxonomic revisions (Nascimento & Feijó 2017; Trindade et al. 2021; Ruiz García et al. 2023), and based on a recent analysis of morphology, genetics and ecology (de Oliveira et al. 2024), the subspecies occurring in Central America and along the Andes was recognized as a full species known as the Andean oncilla or clouded tiger-cat *Leopardus pardinoides* (Schreber, 1775) (de Oliveira et al. 2024).

The clouded tiger-cat ranges along the mountain forest ecoregions from Costa Rica to northern Argentina, with numerous records and habitat descriptions in Central America and the northern Andes, but with a few observations in Bolivia and Argentina (de Oliveira et al. 2024). Records in Bolivia comes from the department of La Paz (Pacheco et al. 2001; Identidad Madidi & SERNAP 2017; Ayala et al. 2022; Fig. 1) were from humid to subhumid montane forest sites in the central Andes, at 1,780 – 2,996 m of elevation, within the Bolivian-Peruvian Yungas ecoregion (Ibisch & Mérida 2003). The modeled distribution range (de Oliveira et al. 2024; Fig. S1) extends within the same ecoregion to the east from La Paz to Santa Cruz, and then turns south toward Tarija and Argentina, roughly aligning with the extent of the Bolivian-Tucumano Yungas ecoregion (*sensu* Ibisch & Mérida 2003), but leaving a large gap without confirmed records of the species (Fig. 1).

During a herpetological survey conducted near the locality of Sehuencas (Latitude -17.506853; Longitude -65.278142) in Carrasco National Park, Cochabamba Department, Bolivia, we unexpectedly came across an adult individual of clouded tiger-cat on 8 February 2025 at 20:28 h. The finding occurred at 2,251 m of elevation on a Yungas secondary montane forest dominated by Andean alder (*Alnus acuminata*), where we found tree ferns (*Cyathea* spp.), 'granizo' shrubs (*Hedyosmum angustifolium*) and 'encenillo' trees (*Weinmannia ovata*) (Navarro 2011). The cat was sitting on an Andean alder tree at 1.30 m above the ground, and remained calm there for about eight minutes, allowing the observer to take video and photos with a cell phone from 2 m apart (Fig. 2 A, B and C, and Supporting Online Material Video 1).

The individual's identification was based on its small size (similar to a domestic cat), short round ears, a convex head profile in lateral view, and sharply defined irregular rosettes mostly solid black, with some hollow ones revealing the brownish-yellow dorsal background. These traits, together with a thick and irregularly banded tail, agreed with descriptions of the clouded tiger-cat (de Oliveira et al. 2024), and it is unlikely that it actually belonged to another cat species. Ocelots *L. pardalis* (Linnaeus, 1758) are much larger and Geoffroy's cats *L. geoffroyi* (d'Orbigny & Gervais, 1844) have small round spots instead of the medium-large irregular rosettes of tiger cats (Vallejo & Carrión Bonilla 2022). Although margays *L. wiedii* (Schinz, 1821) have a similar body size and long tails like tiger cats their more elongated ears, larger eyes, and solid black, spread-out rosettes generally enable to tell them apart (de Oliveira 1998; Romero-Muñoz et al. 2009).

De Oliveira et al. (2024: figure S9) suggest that the variation observed in the rosette

patterns of individuals from the northern and southern Andes could constitute a distinct taxonomic unit. However, no taxonomic decision has been made regarding the species cited in this work. We leave conflicting or changing taxonomic identities to future research that may resolve them.

The unconfirmed presence of the clouded tiger-cat between the humid montane Yungas forests in La Paz (Cotapata Protected Area, Pacheco et al. 2001; "Death Road," Ayala et al. 2022) and the subhumid montane Bolivian-Tucumano forests in Tarija (camera-trap images, Ximena Velez, pers. comm.) has left a large gap—about 760 km in a straight line—in the species' expected distribution range (de Oliveira et al. 2024). Our recent sighting constitutes the first formal record of the clouded tiger-cat in Cochabamba and narrows the species' geographic range gap by approximately 300 km southeast of Cotapata and 460 km north of Tarija. It is also the first record of this cat in Carrasco National Park, increasing the park's known felid species to seven—up from six previously documented along its broad elevation range (Rumiz et al. 1998). Its presence in the humid Yungas of Carrasco suggests the species may also occur in TIPNIS and Amboró protected areas, highlighting the important role of this "green corridor" (Quinteros-Muñoz et al. 2022) connecting the Yungas with the Bolivian-Tucumano forest and protected areas such as Iñao, Aguaragüe, and Tariquía (Fig. 1).

This finding highlights the need of conducting more wildlife surveys in the Yungas and southern Andean forests of Bolivia to improve the knowledge, understanding and opportunities for the conservation of mammals.

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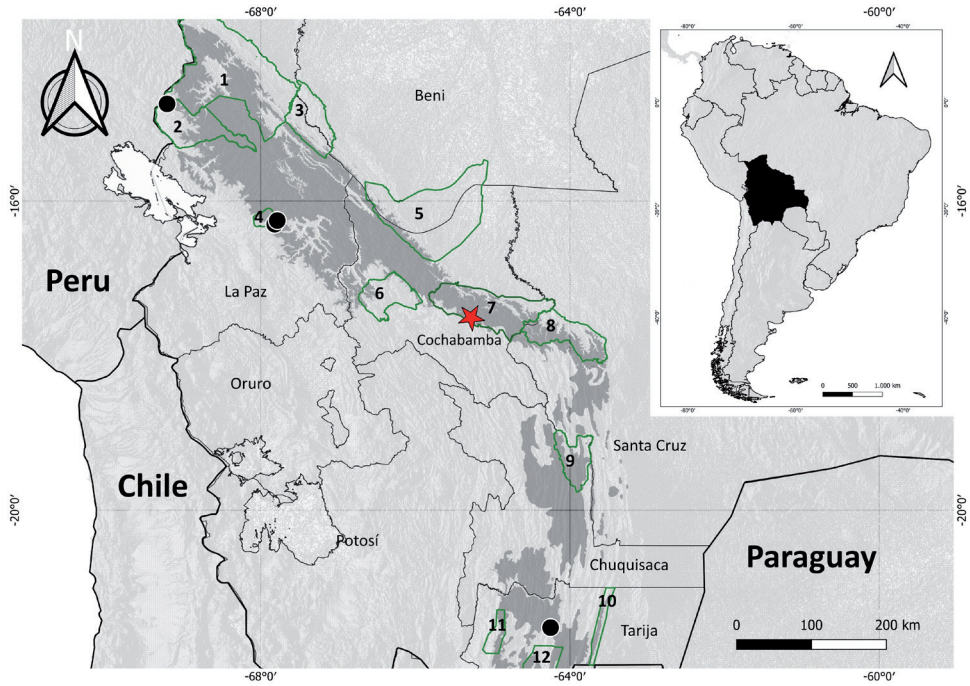

Figure 1. Records of the clouded tiger-cat in Bolivia, (red star = new record; black dots = previous records; dark gray area = Yungas and Tucumano-Boliviano ecoregions; green polygons = national protected areas: 1- Madidi, 2- Apolobamba, 3- Pilón Lajas, 4- Cotapata, 5- TIPNIS, 6- Tunari, 7- Carrasco, 8.-Amboró, 9- Iñao, 10- Aguaragüe, 11- Sama, and 12- Tariquía.

Figure 2. The clouded tiger-cat, recorded at Carrasco National Park, Cochabamba, Bolivia. A: lateral view of the body, showing the cloudy rosette pattern. B: front view of the head and C: lateral view of the head. Images by Oliver Quinteros-Muñoz (see video as SOM 1).

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